

# point of view

ROLDO BARTIMOLE

VOL. 33

NO. 5

## SAYING GOODBYE

The great advantage of being able to write Point of View all these years has been the unfettered freedom it has offered me to observe this community using my own judgement. the great press critic A. J. Liebling said, "Freedom of the press belongs to those who own one."

POV never actually owned a printing press but was able to control what was in the newsletter simply by paying the bill to have it printed. Over the years I've had a number of printers I owe thanks to for being willing to print what might have caused problems for them. Only one – a printer located across from a police station – opted out after printing POV for some time for fear of possible retaliation. Ironic, shouldn't a location near a police station insure added safety?

POV hopefully has often revealed *what seems to be* isn't always what *is*.

The freedom to speak frankly gave me the ability to critically examine people, institutions and events by my standard, not simply following media conventional wisdom. It afforded me the opportunity rarely enjoyed by reporters working for traditional news outlets. Other reporters are bound by strictures related to making a profit, satisfying the powerful and, most important, a worldview that demands protecting the status quo of those who exert power in a city. Major news media outlets are businesses, thus share the community of interest with major businesses and institutions.

Surprisingly, I've never actually been able to spell Point of View properly in this publication. First, the title is, if you look above, lower case, though I capitalize. Secondly, the "e" in "view" is upside down. Here's why. When I started the newsletter I needed a format and luckily a graphic artist, John Morrell, (who did those downtown wall murals) provided it. He did it pro bono. However, he wouldn't agree to do it until he could talk to me and read my point of view. If he was going to do something free he was going to make sure it was worth the effort. He liked the thrust of the first issue given him to read. His conclusion was that this publication was different, thus the upside down "e" to catch the tone symbolic I hope of what POV has tried to be - contrary and, as I wrote in an opening letter to potential subscribers, "religiously irreverent when and as often as necessary."

This freedom almost automatically allows someone willing to examine how power works in a community the ability to look beyond accepted and conventional thinking. You begin to see from perspectives that open new opportunities for judgments. You open for yourself insights that are always there but remain closed down for lack of any incentive to take roads less traveled.

The results often aren't acceptable to conventional intelligence because they invite impolite conclusions about supposed polite society. "Sometimes it's important to be impolite," I. F. Stone once said. This radical approach is crucial because it helps one avoid viewing the world as framed by those with power, as conventional reporting so religiously follows.

One example remembered among many, was the fanciful proposal to build the jetport, and a whole lot more, in Lake Erie. The late James C. Davis, managing partner of Squire Sanders and Dempsey, proposed and pushed the very expensive plan. Though not mentioned in the regular media, the ability to think out of the box made it clear to me why Davis was pushing this plan. The proposal called for huge expenditures via funding by bonds. As usual it came before the public with little public input and much press fanfare. Of course, at the time Squire-Sanders was the only firm here handling bond counsel work and stood to make quite a profit from every dollar spent.

Most of us know in our gut that major undertakings – what’s built in a community, what’s not; what gets financed, what doesn’t; who is taxed, who isn’t; - are controlled generally by faceless interests. There may be special committees. They meet first in private and after they have made the decision they seek “public input” to legitimize their results. The members are never examined as to their self-interests or the community of interest that they represent, which are usually highly suspect. They are typically funded at the start by so-called charitable do-good, clean hand instruments – Cleveland Foundation, Gund Foundation, etc., - then pushed along by other civic, clean hand fronts like Cleveland Tomorrow or the Downtown Cleveland Partnership.

These names have changed over the years but an examination of 32 plus years of POV shows that the motivations and activities don’t much change but are rarely, if ever, examined by any local media in anything but reverential terms. We are supposed to accept their decisions as neutrally made.

The Downtown Partnership would be typical of organizations spotlighted in POV through the years. A relatively newly created entity to do the bidding of our oligarchs, the Downtown Partnership works, as it tells the IRS for its charitable designation, to “engage in the coordination and facilitation of planning, design and implementation of economic and community development for the public benefit and social welfare.”

What it does isn’t necessarily all bad but it is a private entity doing public work about which the public knows little, if anything, about. A main purpose is to lobby public funds to subsidize private interests along Euclid Avenue and downtown. It helped push the \$320 million redo of Euclid Avenue Corridor project via transit funds. Taxpayers even generously contribute annually to the Partnership’s work to help it lobby their public spending for these private interests: RTA, \$20,000; County Port Authority, \$20,000; County Commissioners, \$20,000; City of Cleveland, \$20,000, in the most recent available accounting (1998).

Can we expect our one-newspaper town newspaper to critically examine such institutions that play powerful roles in how public resources are expended? Not likely. The Plain Dealer has been giving \$10,000 annually to the Downtown Partnership.

Similarly, Cleveland Tomorrow – which has played a crucial and successful role in pushing major subsidized projects downtown – reported donations of \$68,700 from the Plain Dealer in its latest IRS report and \$186,000 from the Newhouse (PD owners) Foundation. Doesn’t this contaminate its coverage not only of Cleveland Tomorrow but also of all the projects – Gateway, Browns Stadium, and a host of subsidies – pursued by Cleveland Tomorrow? Don’t contributions of those amounts by a newspaper and its tributary foundation place the newspaper – and eventually its reporters and editors – in a position of conflict of interest?

How can you trust the coverage of a newspaper that puts itself in such a position? Particularly in a one-newspaper town. Liebling also wrote "A city with one newspaper ... is like a man with one eye, and often the eye is glass." I'd have to go a bit farther and say the one eye sees with only one point of view.

You have to watch in particular those institutions that society generally deems "good," because often that's the façade behind which those institutions do what the powerful need to have done. After all they are funded by wealthy interests so how can anyone believe that they will not serve those interests?

This in part was the service that Point of View provided, poking at such institutions and their ties to wealth interests in town. It was a job that unfortunately you could never expect the conventional media to perform.

Reporting at the Plain Dealer on urban renewal, welfare and social issues during the mid-1960s gave me an advantage to view a power structure under severe pressure. It provided me insights that I could later use to weigh how powerful institutions work behind the scenes.

In the 1960s, the times and their emergencies forced the usually unknown (except in receiving accolades) oligarchs to reveal themselves making decisions to restore stability (which they didn't do until the 1980s). Stability for ruling oligarchs means the smooth ability to make decisions with little public scrutiny.

Even under conventional news coverage, I had always been aware that those reporters who gained knowledge by covering some of these issues usually ended up being promoted, going to new jobs, etc., taking with them the institutional memory that might help them and the public see how events are inter-linked. Further, reporters seemed to know the acceptable bounds of criticism of elites and remain well within them to save causing friction. POV allowed the luxury of forgetting such limits.

Being independent gave POV the ability to remain narrow in its coverage and relentless (to the point of being criticized as boringly repetitious) in intensity and repeated coverage of certain issues. With columns in the Cleveland Edition (thanks to Bill Gunlocke) and the Free Times (thanks to the late Richard Siegel and successors) over nearly the last 15 years, there's a record for our times that differs sharply from that of the conventional media.

In reviewing some material trying to write this final issue, I was struck by a quote from me in James Aronson's 1972 book, "Deadline for the Media." "I even feel it a bit of a loss when I become real to a reader by meeting him or her. There's a feeling I get from people that they think POV appears somehow mysteriously since it appears to have no financial backing and no organization backing or producing it." (He also reminded me that the rumor in the early days was that Cyrus Eaton was financing the newsletter. Not hardly. It was even being prepared for production on a borrowed electric typewriter in 1972).

I believe the genesis of POV grew from my experience in my hometown Bridgeport, Connecticut. By taking the 1960 Census and traveling to the worse places cited by

\* \* \* \*

For those who may read this in the future and want to know more about how POV covered issues please consult three special issues covering 16-page issues covering media, mayors and a 30-year review: Vol. 24 #21, Vol. 26, #1; Vol. 30, #12.

poverty and poor housing I was able to see the conditions allowed to exist and to some extent the causes, particularly poor education, poor health and racism.

Though the times today differ dramatically with the 1960s when POV was started, the conditions do not. Our society's view of what can be done about such conditions has changed to a frightening degree. We are in a period when the conditions that once brought protest and a desire to correct human problems leave too many of us, sadly, incapable of even seeking solutions.

During these binge economic times, America's leadership became more malevolent toward those with needs. At a prosperous time when you shouldn't have to be concerned about reactionary policies a whiff of neo-nazi attitudes should warn us that it can happen here. The overwhelming African-American (Who knows oppression here better?) vote against George W. Bush, and thus the Republicans, represents America's canary call to beware the reactionary direction we are heading.

Though you won't be seeing these pages anymore I hope to continue to follow a while longer my adopted motto of unknown origin: "I shall continue to be impossible so long as those who are now possible remain possible."

-30-

\* \* \* \*

NOTE TO ME IN 1966 FROM PLAIN DEALER EDITOR:

"Good job on the sad case of the waitress who has too much money taken out of her paycheck.

"Incidentally, I'm sorry to learn that you are leaving us. Your work in the last year has indicated that your future was pretty bright."

Signed: P. (Phillip) W. Porter, Executive editor.

' \* \* \* \*

To continue reading Roldo get the Free Times weekly or find it under "columns" at the web site: [www.freetimes.com](http://www.freetimes.com)

## **point of view**

P.O. Box 99530  
Cleveland, Ohio 44199

**THANK YOU!**

Thanks to all subscribers  
for their support. Some  
have been with me since  
the beginning. I couldn't  
have survived without  
such staunch backing.